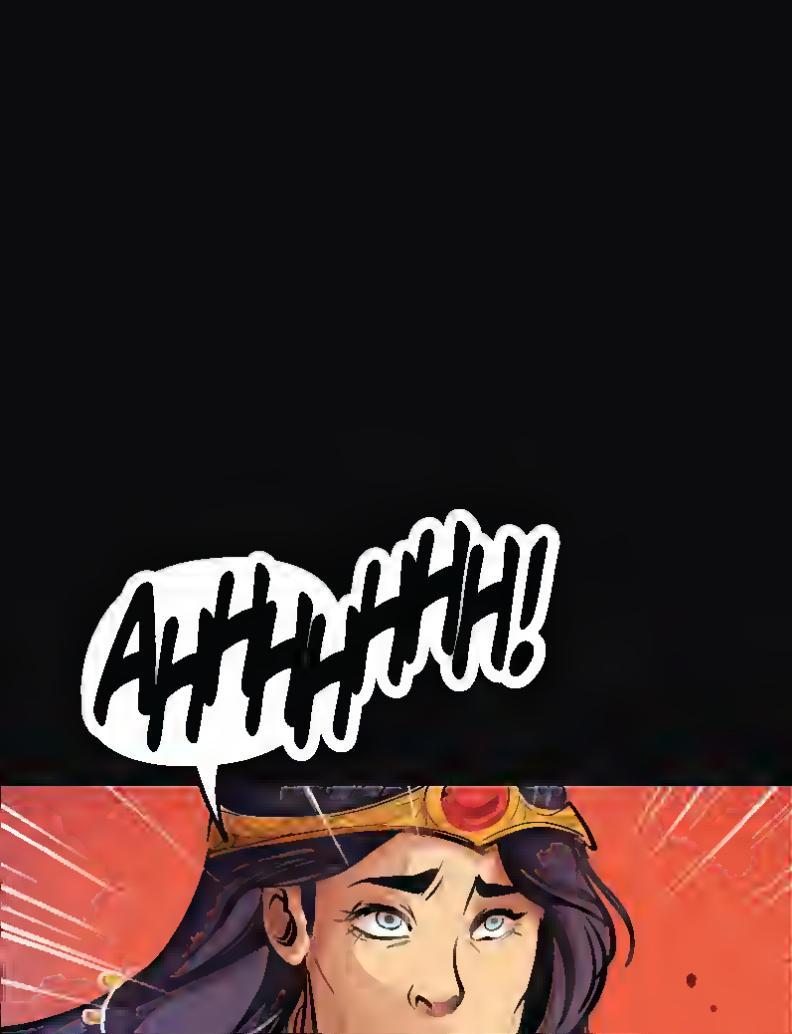
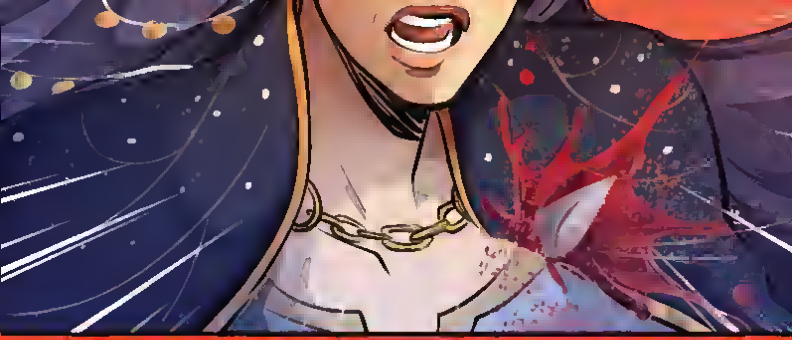

AHHHHHH!



FIREBRAND

THE INITIATION OF NATALI PRESANO

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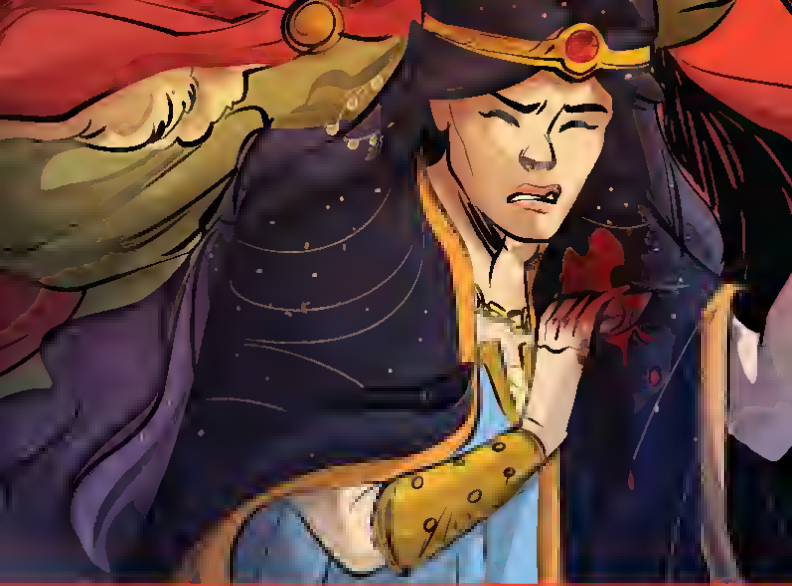
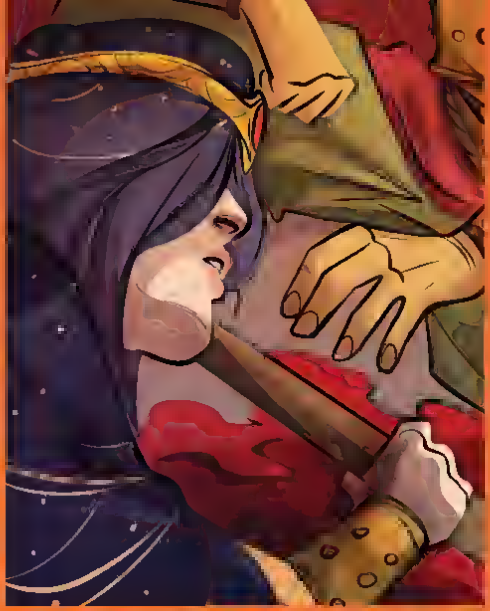
GAH!



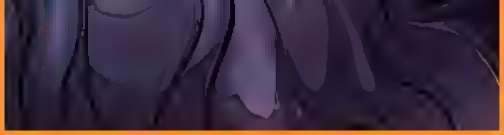
NO!

KOFF

KOFF!
LET ME GO!



AHHH...
SOLDO... Y-YOU HAVE N-NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE DOING...



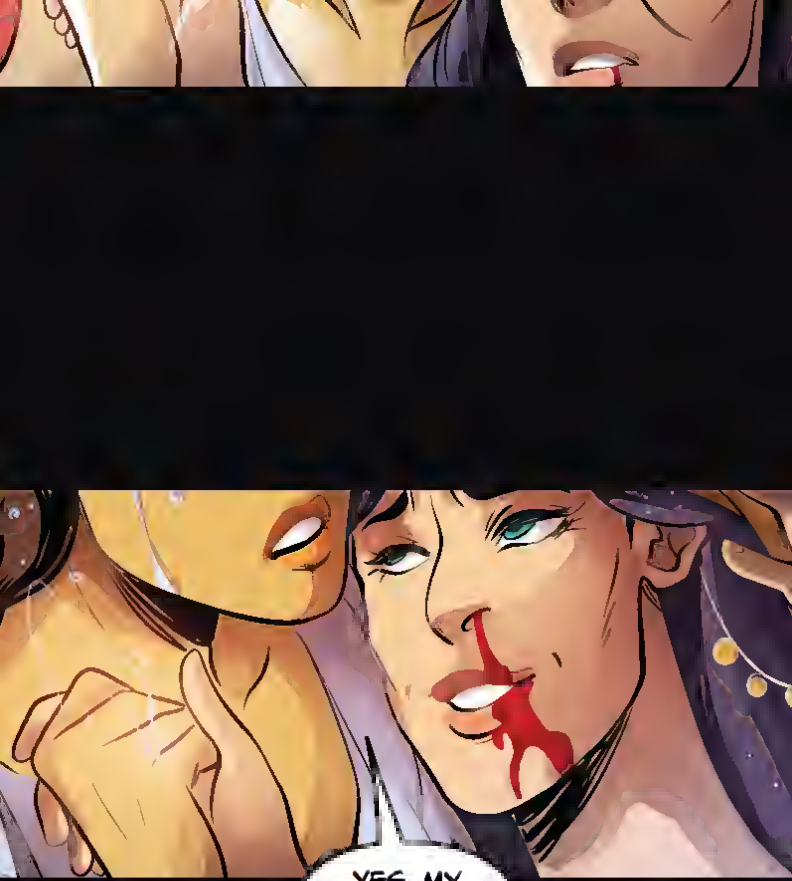
VIOLENCE IS N-NEVER THE A-A-ANSWER...

OUR PEOPLE WILL NOT BE IMPRISONED, MY GODDESS. EVER!

I NEED YOUR HELP.
ANYTHING...
LET ME HOLD YOUR HAND.

LET THE MOON BE MY HEALER. LET THE RAIN WASH AWAY THE BLOOD, AND LET ME SLEEP SO THAT I MAY ONE DAY RETURN TO MY PEOPLE...
MY GODDESS, NO...WE NEED YOU...
YOU WILL KNOW MY WILL, SABINE.

AH! IT HURTS.
BE STRONG. FOR WHEN I'M ASLEEP, Y-YOU WILL H-HELP PROTECT OUR PEOPLE. UNDERSTAND?


YES, MY GODDESS. I WILL BE STRONG FOR YOU.

THE SWORD HAD BEEN DIPPED IN THE BLOOD OF HERENSUGE, THE EVIL DRAGON OF GAUEKO, THE SPIRIT OF THE NIGHT.

TO SAVE HERSELF, THE GODDESS FELL INTO AN EVERLASTING SLEEP, ONE SHE WOULD NOT WAKE FROM UNTIL HER STONE WAS RETURNED.

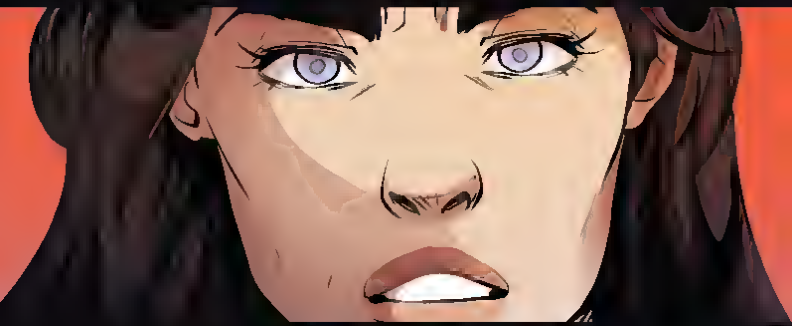
KRAAAK

KRUNCH

BOOM

AND ON THE DAY SHE AWAKES, THOSE WHO BETRAYED HER WILL PAY FOR THEIR CRIMES AGAINST HER, AND HUMANITY. UNTIL THEN, MARI ENTRUSTS THE SAFETY OF HUMANKIND TO THOSE WHO HAVE SWORN LOYALTY TO HER-- HER **IKUZI**.

I'D HEARD THAT TALE TOLD THE EXACT SAME WAY EVERY YEAR SINCE I WAS EIGHT. I'D TAKEN THE OATH OF AN IKUZI WITHOUT EVEN CONTEMPLATING ITS MEANING. IT MEANT FIGHTING, AND POWER, AND MAGIC.



BUT NOW IT DAWNED ON ME THAT THE PLEDGE MEANT SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY. I WAS BOUND TO THE GODDESS.

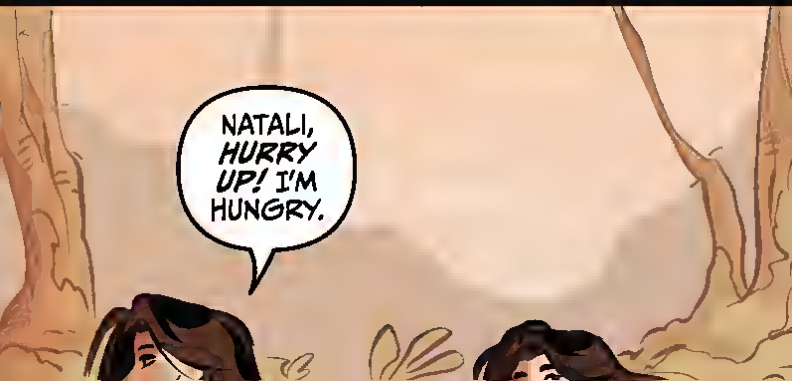
IS THAT BLOOD?
NO. WINE. A LITTLE HAPPINESS TO SWALLOW THE BITTERNESS OF OUR JOURNEY.

WHAT ABOUT PREN?
SHE'S NOT IKUZI. SHE'S BARELY EVEN SORGIN.
I SUDDENLY FEEL BAD FOR MAKING LUKEN FEEL SO *HUMAN*.

ZIGOR, YOU'RE SUCH AN ASS.
I SECOND THAT.
PREN, I SHOULD'VE INVITED YOU SOONER. YOU'RE ENTITLED TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR ANCESTOR'S HISTORY. YOU CAN THANK NATALI FOR INSISTING YOU COME.
YOU READY FOR A REMATCH APPRENTICE?

ANYTIME!

SNAP


NATALI, HURRY UP! I'M HUNGRY.

SUGGAR'S BAR.

NO PROMISES YOUR FRIES WILL STILL BE HERE.
NEVER PEGGED YOU AS THE PEEPING-TOM TYPE.

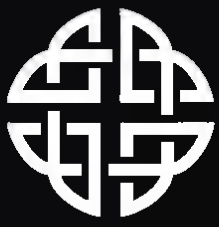
KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN. PLEASE.
OF ALL PEOPLE, I GET IT. YOU WANTED TO SEE YOUR MOTHER.
SUGGAR WOULD NOT BE HAPPY—

YOU FORGOT, DIDN'T YOU? WE'VE GOT THE

PARTY TONIGHT, REMEMBER?
I DID FORGET. SO SORRY. BEEN A CRAZY DAY.
MARE, LET'S SKIP IT AND JUST HANG OUT HERE.
WE CAN'T MISS THIS PARTY!
PARTY? I'M ALWAYS UP FOR A PARTY. I'M IN.

YEAH, BUT--
I'LL LET SELENA KNOW.

I REALLY DON'T THINK THIS IS A GOOD IDEA...



LEGENDARY